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New York

President:	Mr. Wlosowicz	(Poland)
Members:	Chile	Mr. Somavía
	China	Mr. Wang Xuexian
	Costa Rica	Mrs. Incera
	Egypt	Mr. Abdel Aziz
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Guinea-Bissau	Mr. Da Gama
	Japan	Mr. Owada
	Kenya	Mr. Mahugu
	Portugal	Mr. Monteiro
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Choi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Sweden	Mr. Osvald
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Weston
	United States of America	Mr. Richardson

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Twenty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (S/1997/237)

97-85308 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Twenty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (S/1997/237)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Liberia and the Netherlands, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Bull (Liberia) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Berteling (Netherlands) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the twenty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia, document S/1997/237.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/1997/254, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations.

The first speaker is the representative of Liberia, on whom I now call.

Mr. Bull (Liberia): A little over six years ago, this Council issued its first statement on the situation in Liberia. At that time, the Liberian delegation regretted that the Security Council had waited over a year to take action on an earlier request for United Nations intervention. That delay was due, in part, to the Charter's provision which bars involvement in the internal affairs of Member States. My delegation called for a review of that Charter provision so that the Organization could effectively respond to conflict situations which entailed the violation of fundamental human rights or required United Nations intervention on humanitarian grounds.

Today, thanks to the proactive role of the United Nations in conflict resolution, the Liberian conflict, and others like it, are receiving the deserved attention of this Organization.

The delegation of Liberia would like to thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his twenty-second progress report on the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia, contained in document S/1997/237 of 19 March 1997. The Liberian Government and the Liberian people commend him for the dynamism he has brought to his new assignment and for his personal initiatives in support of the Liberian peace process. His convening, at United Nations Headquarters, on 20 February 1997, of the second Ministerial Meeting of the ad hoc Special Conference to Support the Peace Process in Liberia attests to his continuing commitment to peace in Liberia, for which we are profoundly grateful.

The report, one of the most important to come before this Council since the commencement of the civil crisis over seven years ago, offers hope for a new beginning — a rebirth of the Liberian nation. According to the report, in approximately 64 days from now, free and fair democratic elections are scheduled to be held in Liberia, to be followed 15 days later by the inauguration of a new Government. This significant achievement will bring to an end a very sad and painful chapter in the country's history.

On 26 July — approximately 120 days from now — Liberia will be observing its sesquicentenary as a free, sovereign and independent State. This is therefore a time of great promise for Liberia. It can truly be said that while Liberia is an old country — nearly 150 years old — the seed that will be sown on 30 May will hopefully lead to the building of a new nation after many decades of struggle to redress past injustices and to develop a national identity and universal recognition among Liberians of their common destiny.

This encouraging state of affairs is directly attributable to the States members of the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Not only did their nationals shed their blood, but those States expended vast financial resources to help make peace in Liberia. It is due also to the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the widespread international support which now exists for the ECOWAS peace initiative. This pioneering effort by a subregion has made manifest Chapter VIII of the Charter and has demonstrated that, with the requisite political will, countries can act decisively in bringing some of the noble objectives of the Charter to fruition. To each of these States and organizations, we say thank you.

The Secretary-General's report outlines the assistance required from the international community in order to make the 30 May date for the holding of democratic elections a reality. First, resources must be provided for the deployment of three additional battalions to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). This would allow ECOMOG to be deployed throughout the country, which is a prerequisite to ensure freedom of movement, freedom of expression and voter participation free of intimidation. Secondly, the substantial number of eligible voters who are currently residing as refugees in neighbouring countries must be assisted to return home prior to the elections. Resources are required for their voluntary repatriation. Thirdly, ECOMOG requires additional technical support, especially medical supplies, spare parts and anti-riot equipment. Fourthly, assistance is required for the restructuring of the Liberian armed forces and paramilitary units in view of the intention of ECOWAS to withdraw its Monitoring Group from Liberia six months after the elections.

The Liberian delegation urgently appeals for these requirements to be met so that the peace process is not prevented from achieving its desired end: the restoration of democratic governance in Liberia.

The Council of State and its Chairperson, Mrs. Ruth Sando Perry, along with civil society, are fully committed to the restoration of peace and the rule of law in Liberia. Even though some outstanding issues, such as a reconstituted Elections Commission and Supreme Court, have not been fully resolved, they must not be viewed as insurmountable problems. The long-suffering Liberian people have sacrificed much to ensure the irreversibility of the peace process, and will not permit anything or anyone to perpetuate their suffering. However, they are also mindful that, in the final analysis, durable peace can be guaranteed only if the electoral process is credible and acceptable to the vast majority.

In this connection, the Secretary-General's basic framework for the holding of elections in Liberia — agreed to by the Liberian parties and the Economic Community of West African States — is the fundamental requirement for sustainable peace in Liberia. Its full implementation will allow the Liberian people to select their own leaders under conditions which must be declared by all, including the international community, as being free and fair. This is why the Liberian delegation fully supports the adoption of the draft resolution now before the Council and joins in the appeal to the international community to lend its unqualified support to the implementation of the electoral framework.

By the grace of the Almighty, when the Security Council reconvenes again, on or before 30 June 1997, to consider the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), it will be under happier circumstances, since a duly elected Government will have been installed in Liberia. All Liberians have this expectation, and the States members of the Economic Community of West African States, under the leadership of President Sani Abacha of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as States Members of the United Nations, should also take particular pride, for their contributions and unflinching support will have ensured its realization.

At this time of great opportunity for peace and the rebirth of the Liberian nation, my delegation hopes that it can continue to count on the goodwill and support of all Members States of this Organization.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of the Netherlands. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Berteling (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — align themselves with this statement. Norway also aligns itself with this statement.

Today the Council decides on what is hopefully the last extension of the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) before the elections in Liberia, and the European Union wishes, on this occasion, to highlight once again the importance we attach to a peaceful and democratic solution to the devastating conflict which has raged in Liberia for all too long now.

We wish to congratulate the Liberian people on the recent substantial progress made in the peace process. The security situation has improved and violence against civilians has decreased. Disarmament and demobilization are largely in compliance with the Abuja Agreement; civil society is being revitalized and political parties reactivated; most of the country can now be reached by the humanitarian-assistance agencies; cabinet meetings of the Liberian National Transitional Government have resumed; and a start is being made with reform of the police force. Although we are not blind to the dangers that could still threaten the process, we agree with the Secretary-General that

> "the prospects for peace ... now seem to be more promising than at any time since the start of the civil war". (S/1997/237, para. 64)

The European Union therefore fully supports the electoral process as defined by the Liberians and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the basis of the recommendations of the ECOWAS Committee of Nine. These recommendations were endorsed by the Chairman of ECOWAS and were supported by the second Ministerial Meeting of the ad hoc Special Conference to Support the Peace Process in Liberia, held here in New York on 20 February. We welcome the fact that the military component of UNOMIL has now finally reached its full, though small, authorized strength, and we support the Secretary-General's proposal that UNOMIL's electoral unit be strengthened. Every effort should be made to enable as many Liberian refugees as possible to be registered and to vote. The Union notes in this respect the need for voluntary repatriation in the shortest possible time.

Since the timetable for the elections is very tight, we look forward to the installation of the new independent Elections Commission on 2 April; we hope that the reconstituted Supreme Court will follow suit soon thereafter. At this critical juncture, strict adherence to the agreed timetable — the enactment of the electoral law and regulations by the end of March, voter registration in April, and the election campaign in May — is of the utmost importance. Provided the timetable is respected, the European Union confirms its willingness to provide financial and technical assistance to the electoral process. With European funding, a study has already been carried out on the preparations for the elections. The European Union also intends to send a team of election observers to Liberia.

In only two months' time the people of Liberia will vote to freely elect their President and Parliament. Last April, we did not dare dream that today there would be a realistic prospect that elections could take place so soon. Liberia and the international community owe this in no small measure to the unabated efforts of ECOWAS and its successive Chairmen, to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and its Force Commander, to UNOMIL and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. United Nations agencies as well as non-governmental organizations have kept Liberians and their hopes alive during their ordeal. European Union member States have made substantial financial contributions to the peace process. The increased strength of ECOMOG will enable it to play a crucial role in providing a secure environment for the elections. Clear understandings between UNOMIL and ECOWAS are called for in this regard. Important European contributions have also been given for the reintegration of soldiers in civil society following their demobilization. In this regard we would like to stress the importance of immediate arrangements for child soldiers to return to their families and to be reintegrated into society. Bridging programmes have gained momentum, but should be stepped up further.

We must all work to the best of our abilities to make the peace process the decisive success we have been pursuing for several years now. But it is the Liberian people themselves who bear the ultimate responsibility for success or failure. We therefore urge all Liberians, and specifically their leaders, to cooperate with the elections and the peace process as a whole, to respect human rights, to facilitate humanitarian assistance and to seek further disarmament and genuine reconciliation.

The President: It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I shall first call on those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Dejammet (France)(*interpretation from French*): France will vote in favour of the draft resolution before the Council. This text seeks to extend, we hope for the last time, the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) until 30 June 1997.

Much progress has been made since 6 April 1996. Almost a year ago, after the looting in Monrovia, the situation seemed desperate. Following those tragic events, a new agreement was signed at Abuja on 17 August, and on the basis of that agreement, the disarmament of factions, a highly necessary phase, began on 22 November. That process was successfully completed on 9 February. The next stage will be the holding of elections on 30 May, which will lead up to the installation of a new Government on 15 June. When the UNOMIL mandate expires, the entirety of the peace agreement signed by the factions should in principle have been implemented.

We owe these positive results to the tireless efforts of the countries members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), but also to the excellent work accomplished on the ground by the African monitoring force. We also commend the devotion with which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has carried out his mission. All these efforts have improved security in the country, which is an essential condition for the restoration of the confidence and for the completion of the peace process.

The elections, which as I noted earlier constitute the next stage, appear for the first time to be an achievable objective. The ECOWAS Committee of Nine met at Monrovia on 13 and 14 February 1997 to establish an electoral framework with the Council of State. We hope that this process will be scrupulously respected.

However, the timetable for the elections could be extremely tight, as is rightly noted by the Secretary-General. For that reason, we note with concern that the independent Elections Commission has not managed to nominate its chairman as planned.We hope that this difficulty will be overcome by 2 April so that the electoral law can be promulgated on time. Then, names will have to be placed on the electoral rolls during April and the electoral campaign organized in May.

All Liberians, leaders of former factions in particular, must make the necessary efforts to make the elections fair and equitable. For our part, we are prepared to support the role that the United Nations intends to play in the conduct of the election. That is why we are pleased that the draft resolution endorses the Secretary-General's recommendations concerning the tasks to be entrusted to UNOMIL on that occasion.

Naturally, we know that the restoration of democracy in Liberia will merely be a stage on the way to stability. The programmes for demobilizing ex-combatants, for the return of refugees unable to return before the elections and the reintegration of those refugees into the economic life of the country are, we feel, equally essential tasks. France, within the framework of the European Union, is helping to mobilize substantial resources to address these difficulties. We hope that these efforts will not be in vain.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt)(*interpretation from Arabic*): The Council is discussing the question of Liberia. This is in line with the hopes raised at the last ministerial meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Nine, held at Monrovia on 13 and 14 February, that the Liberian factions would meet their commitments under the Abuja Agreement on a peaceful settlement in Liberia and that they will give priority to national considerations and to the national interest of the Liberian people.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General includes positive observations; the military component of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has been supplemented with new forces from Mali and Ghana; the disarmament of factions continues; ECOMOG intends to continue its serious searches for arms that remain in the hands of the factions and to confiscate them; and ECOWAS is cooperating with the United Nations in establishing the framework for the Liberian elections to take place on 30 May, which will include the revitalization of the political parties. On that last point, we welcome another positive step: the understanding that has been reached between the United Nations and ECOWAS on United Nations assistance in the electoral process. We fully support the Secretary-General's recommendation on the means to increase the size and broaden the role of UNOMIL.

Over the past six years, the ECOWAS countries have made great efforts which deserve encouragement and support. Their latest decision to increase the size and effectiveness of ECOMOG, despite the difficult economic conditions of those countries, is clear evidence of their determination to go forward to achieve peace in Liberia. It is also proof that regional arrangements have been sufficient to play an important role. However, for ECOWAS to undertake that role, Liberia and ECOWAS need the support of the international community. In that respect, we thank the countries that have lent financial and technical assistance to ECOMOG and to the United Nations Trust Fund for Liberia. We hope that this

assistance will continue so that ECOWAS and ECOMOG can fully carry out their functions.

The Egyptian delegations supports the draft resolution before the Council, which would extend UNOMIL's mandate for three months, to the end of June. We will vote in favour of the draft resolution. We are convinced that the settlement process in Liberia has reached a turning point. We hope that the elections will take place on 30 May, as planned. We hope that the Liberian leaders will cooperate in making the necessary preparations, including the installation of the independent Elections Commission, following the successful example of Sierra Leone.

A long road will lie before Liberia even after the holding of elections. There are difficult tasks ahead; to absorb 800,000 refugees who are dispersed in neighbouring countries; to reintegrate demobilized combatants into civil society; to build State institutions and infrastructure destroyed by the war, including the Supreme Court; and other tasks. The international community, which stood by Liberia during its wartime difficulties, will certainly support it during peacetime so that Liberia will be able to restore its regional and international position.

Mr. Wang (China)(*interpretation from Chinese*): The Chinese delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution before the Council. We are in favour of the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) for three months. We also are in favour of an even more positive United Nations role in Liberia in support of the peace process, and support the unremitting efforts made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to resolve the question of Liberia.

We are encouraged by the major progress recently achieved in the Liberian peace process. The disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants of the various Liberian factions are key elements in the peace process, and an important prerequisite for the smooth holding of general elections in Liberia. We appreciate the recent political good faith and positive actions on the part of the various factions in Liberia.

As the Permanent Representative of Liberia stated, the ultimate settlement of the question of Liberia rests solely with the Liberian people themselves. This calls for a strong sense of political responsibility on the part of the leaders of Liberia's various factions in conformity with the interests of their country and their people.

The peace process in Liberia has entered its last important phase. We hope that the various Liberian parties will continue their efforts and expedite the completion of all the tasks in the military areas as stipulated in the Abuja Agreement and that they will hold sincere consultations and solve the differences still remaining in the preparatory work for the elections, so that these elections can be held as scheduled on 30 May 1997.

The general elections to be held in Liberia will be an important milestone in the Liberian peace process, as well as in the history of Liberia. The international community, including the United Nations, is duty-bound to actively support this election. We are in favour of shifting the focus of UNOMIL to electoral assistance. We therefore appeal to all sides to assist the elections in Liberian with human, material and financial resources.

No step or accomplishment achieved in the Liberian peace process would have been possible without the strenuous efforts made by ECOWAS. Over the years, ECOWAS countries have overcome their own financial difficulties and, in spite of adversity and setbacks, have made active good-offices and mediation efforts. They have sent peacekeeping troops to Liberia and have helped that country to move from war to peace.

China has always firmly supported the efforts made by ECOWAS in accordance with the United Nations Charter for the solution of questions in the region. We believe that the international community should provide political and financial help to ECOWAS and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Especially now that the peace process in Liberia is at a critical juncture, ECOMOG's ability to assist should be strengthened so that it can carry out its peacekeeping mandate smoothly and help all parties in Liberia to complete the peace process.

Liberia, which has experienced seven years of civil war, will soon achieve peace. This will be a happy event for the people of Liberia, as well as for all the people of Africa. China extends its sincere good wishes to the Liberian people. Together with the rest of the international community, we will continue to make our contribution so that Liberia can achieve peace and stability and enter a new era of rehabilitation and development as soon as possible.

Mr. Monteiro (Portugal): The representative of the presidency of the European Union has just expressed our

common vision of the Liberian peace process and our support for the draft resolution before the Security Council. Portugal notes with deep satisfaction the recent progress made towards the consolidation of peace and national reconciliation in Liberia. We particulary welcome the significant progress in the political and military situation, as described in the report of the Secretary-General dated 19 March 1997.

We hope that the present extension of the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and the Mission's new and important role in the electoral process will constitute positive contributions towards the holding of free and fair elections in that country.

My delegation strongly believes that the maintenance and strengthening of UNOMIL's presence are essential to this phase of the peace process, as underlined in the report of the Secretary-General. In this context, enhanced cooperation between UNOMIL and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) will be an essential element in the success of the peace process.

Let me also welcome the agreement between the Council of State and the Economic Community of West African States on a basic framework for the holding of elections in Liberia. We call on both the Liberian Council of State and ECOWAS member States to work jointly, with renewed energy, towards the full implementation of that agreement.

The peace process is now entering a new and crucial phase. Timely conclusion of this phase is essential both to the credibility of the peace process and to the viability of the coming elections. We support the efforts of ECOWAS, and we very much hope that all the parties will abide by the timetable established in the Abuja Agreement. I also underline the importance we attach to the establishment of electoral law and regulations by the end of this March, to the registration of voters in April and to the election campaign in May.

Like other delegations, we very much favour the strengthening of ECOMOG, and we also would like to pay tribute to the very important role of ECOMOG's Force Commander in the area of the demobilization of the ex-combatants of all Liberian factions.

Organizing elections is not an easy task, especially in countries which have experienced civil war. Several requirements must be met in order to organize free, fair and internationally verifiable elections in Liberia. I would just like to mention several items deserving of careful consideration at this essential stage of the preparations: the urgent installation of the independent Electoral Commission and the reconstituted Supreme Court; the registration of voters; and the return of refugees — and I would like to stress that this is indispensable for the credibility of the entire electoral process. The possibility of non-participation by almost 30 per cent of the Liberian population in the elections should be a matter of great concern for the international community.

As we have stated on other occasions, we strongly believe that the primary responsibility for peace and national reconciliation in Liberia rests with all Liberian parties. We urge all Liberians to cooperate fully with the peace process, in order to consolidate national reconciliation and to move the disarmament process forward. We also urge all Liberian leaders to create conditions of security for everybody. Their commitment to respect human rights in the country and their facilitation of humanitarian activities are of particular importance.

The United Nations and regional organizations must continue to play an important role in Liberia. However, the role of those organizations cannot be confined to the strict implementation of the military and political aspects of the peace agreement. They should help and promote all efforts to alleviate the present difficulties that the Liberian people are facing.

In conclusion, I would like to echo the appeal to the international community to support actively not only the economic and social reconstruction of Liberia but also Liberian institutions directly involved in the preservation of law and order.

The draft resolution before us is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Osvald (Sweden): I would first like to say that we fully share the views expressed by the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union a few minutes ago on the situation in Liberia.

Sweden welcomes the progress made in the peace process in Liberia. It is especially encouraging that the security situation in the country has improved and that there have been significant achievements in the demobilization process.

The forthcoming elections will be an important step towards democracy in Liberia. In this context, Sweden welcomes the recommendations on a basic framework for the elections, as endorsed by the Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The timetable for the elections is, however, extremely tight. It is imperative that the parties do their utmost to facilitate its implementation.

It is important that the large number of Liberian refugees be given the opportunity to cast their votes. The prompt voluntary repatriation of refugees is therefore essential.

The ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has played an important role in the Liberian peace process and will continue to do so. ECOMOG will also play an important role in the electoral process in ensuring the security and protection of international personnel. In this context too, we welcome the cooperation between ECOMOG and UNOMIL.

Sweden believes that a prolongation of the mandate of UNOMIL and an extension of its tasks in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General will promote the process of peace and democracy in Liberia. We will therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution now before us.

Mr. Somavía (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I would like to welcome to the Security Council Ambassador Bull of Liberia, who is here under circumstances that are much more positive than those that existed in the past.

After much tragedy in its terrible history of the past seven years this is a time of hope for Liberia. The peace process is entering its final stage with the beginning of the electoral process. As we have been told by the Secretary-General, certain very positive factors are currently emerging in Liberia that were unimaginable only months ago, which gives us serious hope that Liberia can embark on a peaceful electoral process in an acceptable security situation.

I wish to mention some of those factors. In the past we have described in great detail the problems that Liberia has confronted. I therefore really do not want to miss this opportunity to highlight the good things that are happening. Relative peace has continued to prevail throughout the country. There have been noteworthy achievements in the disarmament process. The personnel of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) will soon be deployed in the two counties in which they are not yet deployed. The civilian population is gradually gaining confidence. A revitalization of civil society and of the political parties is taking place. The human rights community continues to gain strength and to make its presence felt in the country's political and social spheres. The humanitarian community continues to broaden its operations in the interior of Liberia and is increasing its access to the population in those regions.

These facts are quite indicative of the fact that the Liberian crisis is beginning to be resolved in a positive way. In other words, the prevailing conditions in Liberia could provide a reasonable basis for organizing and holding the elections which are planned for 30 May. This, as we were told by the representative of Liberia in his statement, is a possible basis for the rebirth of the Liberian nation.

In spite of all this, there are a few matters which concern us and of which the international community will have to be watchful. First, one third of the combatants have yet to be disarmed. This is a disquieting factor and one which we hope will not have a negative impact on the process.

Secondly, the time remaining before the elections is undoubtedly extremely short. Moreover, there is a delay in the formation of the new independent Election Commission and the re-established Supreme Court. It is legitimate to wonder whether there will be sufficient time for the elections to be held on the scheduled date. Nonetheless, it is extraordinarily important that those elections be held as scheduled.

We have recently received more good news. The Force Commander of ECOMOG has reported that the territory of Liberia has been cleansed of landmines. This will make it possible for people to move about the country without the fear of mines in their path. This should facilitate the return of refugees who want to participate in the electoral process. However, I also believe that from the perspective of the international community — which has attached so much importance to reducing the impact of anti-personnel mines — this is an example of how problems of this nature can be resolved when the resources to do so exist.

Lastly, I would like to thank and congratulate the Secretary-General, his Special Representative, and the personnel of UNOMIL, ECOWAS and ECOMOG for the role they have played and continue to play in Liberia. A

few months ago, in 1996, we were witnessing a situation in that country which seemed impossible to resolve. However, we now see that the Liberians have gotten down to serious work for their future. We wish them every success, and congratulate them on what they are doing.

In this framework, we must therefore begin the transition towards the point when Liberia can stabilize the political and security situation with a Government that enjoys internal and external legitimacy. This means that the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and the donor countries must give high priority to Liberia in order to promote the economic and social development of the country.

As for the Security Council, we must ensure a fluid link between the responsibilities of the Council — which, if everything continues as we are now seeing in Liberia, will come to an end in the near future — and the transition towards support for cooperation for development, which, in the final analysis, is the only stable source of peace, as it reduces poverty, generates employment and brings about reconciliation after such a terrible conflict. It is our responsibility to ensure that link between the peace and security stage and the stage of furthering development.

For all the reasons we have described, my delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution before the Council, which will extend the mandate of UNOMIL to 30 June 1997.

We would once again like to congratulate all those who have made this process possible, in particular the leaders and the people of Liberia, on the present state of affairs.

Mr. Owada (Japan): The recent history of Liberia can only be described as tragic. After seven years of civil war the national infrastructure is in ruins and the very fabric of society has disintegrated. It is therefore gratifying to note that since January this year there have been signs that the situation in Liberia is beginning to stabilize. There have been no reports of cease-fire violations in more than two months now and some improvements are discernible in the humanitarian situation. The recent seizure of a stockpile of weapons at the residence of a retiring member of the Council of State, however, is a clear signal that the situation in Liberia is still fraught with danger.

Vigilance on the part of the international community is particularly necessary at this time when preparations are under way for the elections that are scheduled to be held on 30 May. The time-table for holding the elections is extremely tight. It is essential for the Liberian parties to redouble their efforts to ensure that free and fair elections are held as scheduled as an essential phase of the peace process in Liberia. The elections, if held on time and in a free and fair manner, will provide the first opportunity for the people of Liberia to express their views as to how and by whom they wish to be governed, and thus consolidate the ground for the establishment of a stable foundation for national reconciliation.

The validity of any elections is enhanced when they gain the fullest possible participation of the electorate. The elections in Liberia are no exception. Their legitimacy would be greatly enhanced by the participation of those citizens who return from their place of refuge in neighbouring countries. Therefore, it will be particularly important for the situation on the ground to improve and for the refugees to feel secure enough to return voluntarily. This is important not only from the humanitarian point of view, but also in terms of consolidating the electoral process through enhanced legitimacy.

Let me emphasize in this context the importance of the continued presence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in maintaining a secure environment in Liberia. Japan recognizes that the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), which is working closely with ECOMOG, is also playing an essential role in the peace process, and believes that it can expand its role to include the electoral process. My delegation therefore welcomes the extension of UNOMIL's mandate for an additional three months, until 30 June.

There is no doubt that the holding of free and fair elections will be a milestone in the peace process. But the elections are just a beginning, and the road ahead to true and lasting peace will be an arduous one. The wounds inflicted by the extended civil war are deep and not easily healed, and the very socio-economic fabric of Liberia as a nation must be restored. Achieving national reconciliation and consolidating a framework for a true political settlement are but two of the difficult tasks that lie ahead.

As has been pointed out, the responsibility for accomplishing these tasks lies chiefly with the Liberian people themselves. But while the Liberian people must take the lead, the international community, for its part,

should be ready to follow with assistance. I wish, on behalf of my Government, to pledge that Japan is prepared to play a meaningful role in such assistance efforts. In fact, Japan has already been extending electoral assistance through a contribution to the United Nations Trust Fund for Liberia. As preparations for the elections proceed, Japan will further consider a wide range of assistance to the people of Liberia, including the possibility of funding the purchase of elections-related equipment and of dispatching personnel to serve as electoral observers. The international community has to be prepared to make every effort to ensure that the ongoing peace process, which has been showing encouraging signs of progress in recent weeks, may be successfully concluded.

Mr. Richardson (United States of America): Liberia has taken important steps forward in this mandate in the political and security fields. Most importantly, there is a real possibility of elections in an environment relatively free of fighting and intimidation. Progress on disarmament has taken place, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has deployed in nearly every part of the country. Under Operation Assured Lift, the United States Air Force transported an additional 1,200 West African peacekeepers to Liberia, which helped ECOMOG expand its presence as election preparations get under way.

But risks to peace remain, and we must continue to be vigilant. Large numbers of fighters have not disarmed, and the factions, although formally non-existent after 31 January, have not fully disbanded their command and control structures. ECOMOG continues to discover weapons in various parts of the country, even in Monrovia. The stakes in this election are high, and the threat of violence has not disappeared. We appeal to the former faction leaders and their fighters to complete disarmament by turning in to ECOMOG all remaining weapons.

The Liberian people deserve the best election possible, and the United States is concerned at the delays in inaugurating the independent Elections Commission. As each day passes, the 30 May deadline becomes more challenging, given the considerable logistical work that free and fair elections require. We hope that the Elections Commission and the Supreme Court will be installed and will start to function without further delay.

We are also very concerned that a level playing field be created for all candidates to compete openly and for all citizens to vote freely in the elections. We would like to see equal access by the various political parties to the media, particularly radio, to enable them to share their views with as many people as possible. The Secretary-General's report notes the importance of radio communication for voter education, and we look forward to further details on United Nations plans for radio programming.

The United States supports the fullest possible voluntary participation by all Liberians in the election process. The Liberian Government and electoral authorities, and Member States in which Liberian refugees are located, should make every effort to achieve that objective.

In voting for today's draft resolution, the United States supports the extension of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) through June to enable UNOMIL to assist with preparations for and observation of these elections. We welcome the Secretariat's assurance to the Council that the new electoral activities can be carried out within UNOMIL's existing resources. We commend all those who have offered financial contributions and other support to Liberia's elections. The voluntary contributions for the elections should be fully utilized before election activities are funded out of the UNOMIL budget. Once the elections have concluded, including a run-off if necessary, the role for the military observers should be completed and UNOMIL should begin the drawdown of its operation. We would like to see some of UNOMIL's activities, particularly the monitoring of human rights, continue as programs under the appropriate United Nations agencies after UNOMIL formally concludes as a mission.

Liberia and the international community look towards elections in the hope that the long, devastating cycle of destruction has ended. UNOMIL, in conjunction with ECOMOG, has contributed greatly to the peace process as it has moved farther ahead than at any time in the past. ECOMOG's role in providing security is of primary importance and continues to be essential for the final stretch in the difficult run-up to elections.

The people of Liberia will soon demonstrate that they can peacefully elect new leaders for the future. We wish them, in collaboration with ECOWAS, the Organization of African Unity, the United Nations and their international friends, the greatest possible success in this democratic endeavour.

The President: It is my understanding that the Security Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the

draft resolution (S/1997/254) before it. If I hear no objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Chile, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, France, Guinea-Bissau, Japan, Kenya, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1100 (1997).

There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council will remain seized of the matter.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.